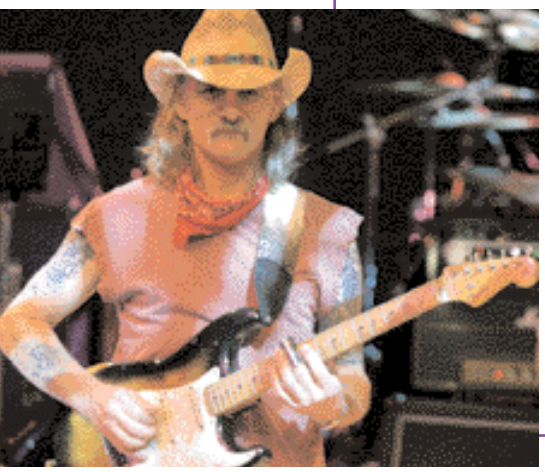
INTERMEDIATE

HOW TO PLAY LIKE... DICKEY BETTS

BY VINCENT DEMASI

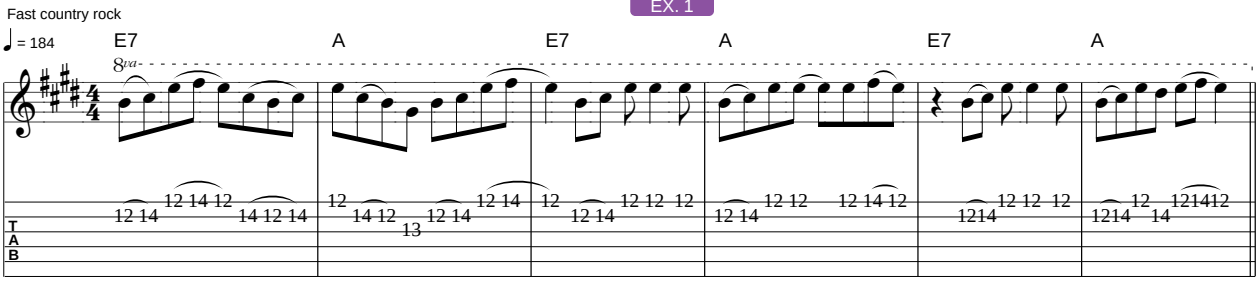


When most guitarists think of the Allman Brothers Band, the image usually held in their minds is that of the late, great slide master Duane Allman. While Duane was a peerless icon of the electric blues, his counterpart in the Allmans' potent twin-guitar assault, Dickey Betts, was equally responsible for the group's innovative sound. Betts injected the band with a healthy dose of jazz and country, and was the major architect of the Allmans' extended in-concert improvisational forays. Protracted instrumentals such as "In Memory of Elizabeth Reed" and "Jessica" showcase Betts' stellar mastery of theme and variation.

Not content to merely race stepwise up and down scales, Betts harnessed simple phrases and expanded them hypnotically through the use of repetition, variation, and rhythmic displacement. Ex. 1—based on a repeating four-note E major pentatonic shape that would be a hackneyed rock cliché in the hands of a less inspiring guitarist—is a perfect demonstration of burn à la Betts. Using restatement, elongation, and the shifting of rhythmic accents, this and other of Betts' cohesive leads sustain interest, build drama, and allow band mates to ad lib groovy counterpoint lines.

The Allmans were also one of the first rock bands to use modes as a launch pad for uncharted musical exploration. Ex. 2 stakes out a theme using the A Dorian mode, a favorite of Betts. Dig the original four-bar phrase and how its adaptation in measures 5-8 works in a "call and response" manner. For more inspiration from Betts, be sure to spin Eat a Peach, Brothers and Sisters, and the timeless live album At Fillmore East.

EX. 1



EX. 2

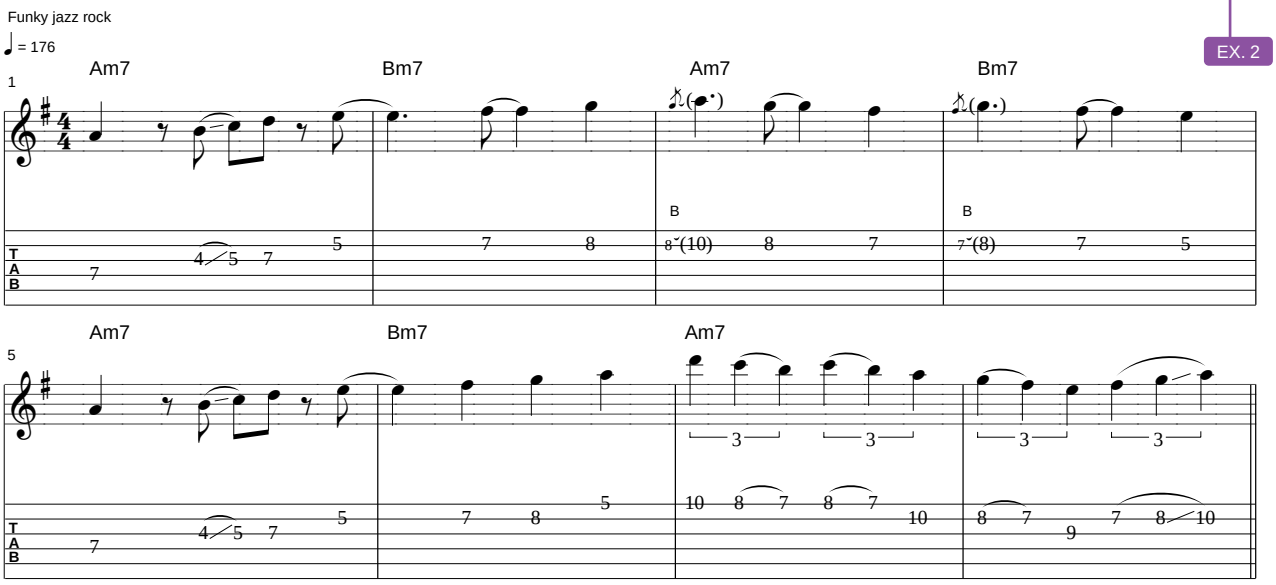
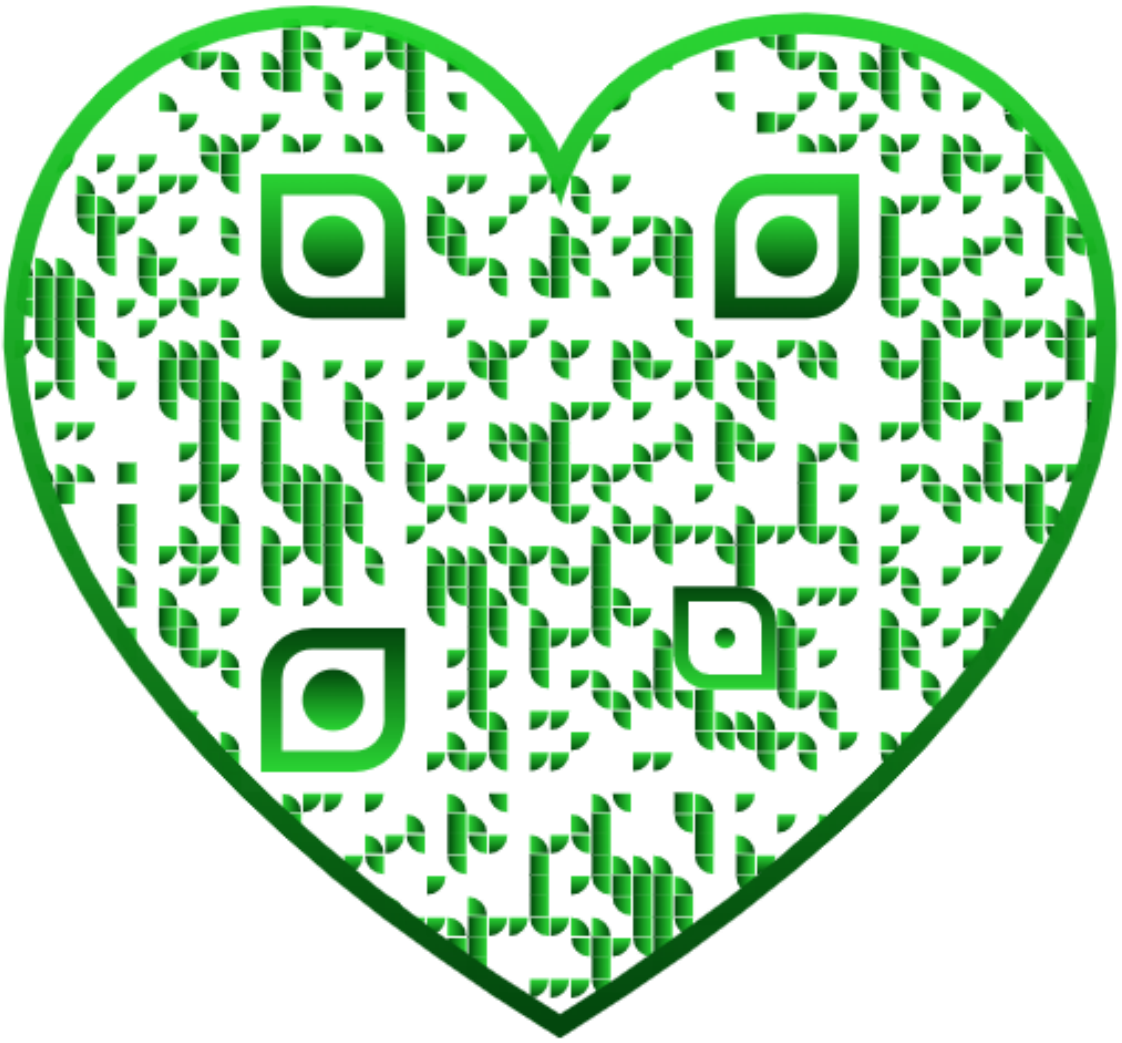



PHOTO: RAHAV SEGEV/RETNA LTD.